



Participation of Carolina Jiménez Sandoval, President of the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), at the Regular Session of the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States on

October 2, 2024.

Good morning,

**Mr. Chairman of the Permanent Council - Ambassador Lynn Raymond Young.
Mr. Secretary General of the OAS, Luis Almagro.
Representatives of the Member States of the Organization of American States.
Colleagues from civil society and the general public.**

We have to talk about Venezuela. As established in Article 7 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter of this organization, "democracy is indispensable for the effective exercise of fundamental freedoms and human rights". Therefore, the defense of democracy is tied to the defense of human rights, including the defense of the right to vote. Hence, it is indefensible to recognize or normalize the authoritarian regimes in our hemisphere, which strengthen their hold when a government declares itself victorious without presenting the most basic evidence required by law. In the case of Venezuela, this refers to the publication of results by individual polling stations. Article 155 of the Organic Law of Electoral Processes clearly states that the results of such electoral processes must be published in the Electoral Gazette within 30 days following the proclamation of the elected candidates. This has not occurred in Venezuela.

Thus, we face a peculiar reality: the lack of evidence is itself the evidence. The refusal of Nicolas Maduro's government to present the electoral records makes it impossible to recognize any legitimacy or legality in his claim as the elected president. . The Venezuelan government's allegation of computer hacking and cyberattacks has already been dismantled by several experts.

In response to this, the Venezuelan people did not remain silent. Through various forms of protest, they demonstrated to the country and the world their disagreement with the results presented by the National Electoral Council, which lacks independence and impartiality. What followed was one of the worst waves of repression that Venezuela has experienced in its recent history. According to the data from NGO Foro Penal there are:

- 1867 political prisoners in Venezuela (of these, 1723 have been detained since July 19).
- 15 of them are Indigenous people.

- 68 are under 18 years of age, meaning they are children under the Convention of Child Rights. I would also like to add that most of these children are being charged with terrorism. Let us not forget: these are children.

In addition to arbitrary detentions, there have been enforced disappearances, some of them of short duration, selective repression against human rights defenders, journalists (13 journalists are imprisoned), union leaders, community leaders, as well as opposition political leaders. As a result of this repression, we are deeply concerned by an increasingly suffocated civic space. It should therefore come as no surprise that we are currently witnessing an increase in the number of people forced into exile, some of them without identity documents, as the arbitrary cancellation of documents has also become one of the measures adopted by the government against hundreds of citizens.

Unlike the electoral results announced by the National Electoral Council, civil society has documented evidence of the state terrorism referred to by the honorable Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to describe the various repressive practices that have been implemented in Venezuela. We thank the Commission for its valuable work on behalf of the victims and ask you, the member states of the Organization of American States, to judge for yourselves where the truth is documented and where, two months later, it is completely absent. We ask that, beyond your political differences and ideological affinities, you stand with the thousands of victims of human rights violations and with the Venezuelan people, because there is nothing more painful for the victims than to be condemned to indifference or oblivion.

The history of the hemisphere has taught us a lesson: human rights violations occur in different political contexts, and all violations of our fundamental rights, without distinction, harm our dignity. This organization cannot allow state terrorism practices to be a part of the history of the Americas in the 21st century.

Put yourselves then, for a moment, in the victims' shoes, in the despair of the families who, for days or weeks, do not know the whereabouts of their loved ones after an arrest, in the anguish of the mothers of children being charged with terrorism, in the distress of the journalists who no longer report the news because they are behind bars or censored, in the tragedy of the elderly who cannot survive on an insufficient monthly pension amid a complex humanitarian emergency. And above all, put yourselves in the place of the Venezuelan people, who voted democratically and peacefully on July 28, hoping to change the course of the country, only to see their sovereign expression continuously violated.

Recently, the UN Fact-Finding Mission stated before the UN Human Rights Council that the actions of the security forces and the political leadership of the Venezuelan government are aimed at dismantling and demobilizing the organized political opposition, suppressing independent information, silencing criticism of the government, and preventing peaceful citizen protests. The Mission further determined that there are reasonable grounds to believe that some of the human rights violations investigated during the reporting period followed the same pattern

as those previously characterized in previous reports by the Mission as **crimes against humanity**.

Given all of this, I conclude by making several requests to this honorable Permanent Council:

First, as member states of the OAS, do not forget that democracy, in its most essential conception, is a matter of guaranteeing, respecting and protecting human rights, beyond the political ideologies that should exist in any democratic context. In this regard, I ask that you maintain mediation efforts and diplomatic pressure on Venezuelan authorities to put an end to the policy of terror and pave the way for a democratic transition, ensuring that Venezuela does not fall into oblivion.

Second, member states must ensure respect for the sovereignty of the Venezuelan people, who peacefully exercised their right to vote, even though they knew that the conditions were not in place for the elections to be free and fair.

Third, we call on those OAS member states that are also members of the United Nations Human Rights Council to vote in favor of renewing the mandate of the Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela, which expired last month.

Fourth, states must adopt a regional policy response to migration from a human rights perspective. There are already 7.7 million Venezuelans living outside their homes and country. Given the expected increase in forced displacement as a result of the current crisis, which is already being documented, mechanisms must be put in place for the migratory regularization and integration of those fleeing Venezuela, often without documents.

It is urgent to support the Venezuelan diaspora to prevent it from becoming, as the Venezuelan government seems to want through its measures, a "punished diaspora".

Finally, we remind this Council that since the signing of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, the OAS has embraced respect for democratic values as a pillar of hemispheric relations. What has happened in Venezuela sets a dangerous precedent for the future of democracies in the region. Therefore, urgent consensus among the members of this and other hemispheric forums is needed to continue promoting a solution to this crisis where respect for the popular will of the Venezuelan people prevails.

THANK YOU.

Dr. Carolina Jiménez Sandoval, President, Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)